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**New Program Provides Indian Business Owners with Funds to Grow
Their Business**

(HELENA) – The Montana Department of Commerce has selected two Fort Peck Reservation entrepreneurs to be recipients of business development funds from the newly created Montana Indianpreneur Equity Fund.

Don LaRoque, the owner of Image Casters and Curtis and Jenny Trinder, the owners of Trinder Enterprises will split \$7,875 in funds to provide them the equity needed to grow their businesses on the Fort Peck Reservation.

“The Montana Indianpreneur Equity Fund is a valuable resource for entrepreneurs who are searching for the funding necessary to propel their business to the next level,” said Governor Brian Schweitzer. “Through this fund, Indian business owners will have the opportunity to achieve their goals and enhance their communities. Each success story will add to the momentum of economic change in Indian Country.”

The Montana Department of Commerce launched the Montana Indianpreneur Equity Fund pilot project in February 2007, as a resource for current or prospective Native American business owners interested in starting or expanding their business. The project was developed by Commerce in cooperation with the State Tribal Economic Development Commission and the Governor’s Office of Economic Development.

“This equity fund helps empower Indianpreneurs who have dreamt of starting a business, but haven’t had access to the equity needed to make their dream a reality,” said Department of Commerce Director Anthony Preite. “The beauty of the Equity Fund is that it is flexible enough to accommodate new and growing businesses and funds will be leveraged with other monies or investment to create the maximum benefit.”

Don LaRoque will use the funds to upgrade his jewelry casting equipment and increase his production at Image Casters. Increased production will allow LaRoque to supply his products to the National Park system. He hopes to hire additional employees as his work increases. LaRoque has been an artisan throughout his life. As a boy his father taught him pipe making and he has been working with castings and jewelry for nineteen years.

Curtis and Jenny Trinder will use their equity funds to improve their family construction company in Wolf Point. Trinder Enterprises is focused on selling and installing windows, doors, kitchen cabinets and appliances. The Trinder's will utilize the funds to renovate a portion of their store and to purchase appliances to showcase to customers. Curtis concentrates on construction, sales and management, while Jenny maintains the estimating, bookkeeping and billing.

The Department of Commerce and State Tribal Economic Development Commission has made \$70,000 in Indian Country Economic Development (ICED) monies available for the Equity Fund. Equity Funds require a minimum dollar-per-dollar match from outside funds or collateral.

Other recipients include businesses owners from the Rocky Boys, Fort Belknap, Blackfeet, Flathead and Northern Cheyenne Reservations, and the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa.

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